

THE FATE OF POLAND—GERMAN PEACE PROPOSALS IN EAST

If the Teutonic Powers Win, Poland Will Become a Buffer State, Materially Enlarged by Accessions from Galicia and Put Under a German Protectorate.

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In the past few months, ever since the German advance in the East came to a halt, last September, there have been frequent suggestions of a general peace, based on the restoration of the conditions that existed in Western Europe prior to August, 1914. Germany, it would seem, is prepared to resign her western conquests, but all her proposals or all the proposals made with her approval have contained the assertion that Poland must be separated from Russia and erected into a separate state under German protection and ruled by a German prince.

The very last of these German suggestions, first put forth from German sources in Washington, intimated that the new Poland would include both the Russian portion of the ancient Sobieski state and the Austrian share, which includes Cracow and possibly Przemyśl, so much fought about in the Eastern War. To compensate Austria for this sacrifice there is advanced the plan for the annexation of Serbia, Montenegro and North Albania, Macedonia and some other fractions of King Peter's kingdom to be assigned to Czar Ferdinand of Bulgaria as a reward for his services in the present conflict.

Not Yet Is Poland Lost.

Conceivably, then, the war will see the restoration of the old Polish state, not all of it, to be sure, not half of the vast regions that represented the maximum extension of the Polish kingdom, but those portions which in the last partitions, those of 1793 and 1795, were assigned to Prussia and Austria, and in 1815 were divided between Austria and Russia, exception being made for the Province of Posen.

Roughly speaking, this would restore to Poland some 17,000,000 out of the 20,000,000 who would naturally be included in a Polish state were the ethnological conditions to be recognized. It would restore to Poland all of her lawful possessions save only those taken by Prussia. So far there has been no suggestion that Prussia should also make restitution, and it must be recognized at the outset that the Prussian problem is really the serious obstacle to a reunited Poland.

To take the ethnological aspect of the question first, a glance at a map showing the races of Eastern Europe will reveal the fact that the whole of that great western curve of Russia which in military reports of last year was described as the Polish salient is inhabited by Poles. The area of this district is slightly less than that of the State of New York and the population around 12,000,000. Eastward toward Brest-Litovsk, Bialystok and Grodno the Poles overflow into Russian districts, but, roughly speaking, the Russian Poles are concentrated in the old Polish territory west of the Bug and the Niemen, which is marked on the maps as Russian Poland.

In Austrian Galicia the same thing is disclosed. All of Western Galicia from the Carpathians to the Russian frontier and from the Prussian and Bohemian boundaries to the San is inhabited by Poles, who overflow westward toward Lubek. Roughly speaking, this Polish population predominated in some 15,000 square miles of Galicia. East of the San the majority of the people belong to the White Russian branch of the Slav family and are not merely distinct from the Poles but separated from them by religious faith and actual political hostility.

Prussian Poland.

So far it would be a simple matter to reconstitute a Polish state. To join Russian and Austrian Polish territories would be to make a fairly square block of territory, having an area of some 59,000 square miles and counting 17,000,000 people, the very large majority of whom are Poles. Such a division would not raise any serious question by assigning to the new state people of other races. Aside from the Jews, the non-Polish element in this state, mainly German, would not be very considerable, and there would be no consequent trouble.

But turning now to the Polish districts in Eastern Prussia the situation is very different. Westward from Russian Poland the Poles overflow into the Prussian provinces of Silesia, Posen and East and West Prussia. North from Russian Poland a very clearly marked tongue of territory inhabited by Poles stretches up to the Baltic and thrusts a wedge between the wholly German populations in the northern portion of East Prussia and in the rest of Germany west of this Polish projection.

To restore to the Poles the districts in Silesia and Posen and in the southern half of East Prussia, in that Masurian Lake region which was familiar in the Hindenburg stories of the earlier months of the war, would not only destroy the solidarity of the Prussian Kingdom, but if the Polish districts in West Prussia were added, then East Prussia would become a mere island of German-speaking people, cut off from the Germanic mainland by the Polish regions in West Prussia stretching north along the Vistula to Danzig.

Again, if the Polish districts in Posen were assigned to the new Polish kingdom, then another arm of Polish territory would project far westward into Germany and approach within less than 150 miles of Berlin. Finally, the Silesian districts, which are populated by the Poles, stretch to the Oder and include the most highly mineralized districts of Eastern Germany. Looking backward, it will be recalled that in the first partition of Poland, in 1772, Frederick the Great played the "honest broker," taking for himself only that Netze district which is the political name for the Polish peninsula stretching north to the Baltic, solely to unite East Prussia with the rest of the Brandenburg estate. At the Congress of Vienna the Prussian monarch of that time managed to save for his country from the wreck of the Polish estates the Grand Duchy of Posen.

The True Obstacle.

It will be seen, then, that the main difficulty in the pathway of a complete restoration of Poland is found in the unfortunate commingling of German and Slav populations in Eastern Prussia. Austria could resign Galician Poland and Russia could surrender Russian Poland without in any way affecting the unity of their remaining territories and without in the smallest measure affecting their own military or political unity.

But if Germany should surrender all the lands which are populated by Poles and possessed by Prussia, she would actually break Prussia into two parts and seriously impair the situation of Silesia in relation to the rest of Northern Prussia. In a word, the partition of Poland in the eighteenth century gave Austria and Russia some outlying territory of considerable value, but not vital to their unity or safety, while it actually permitted Prussia to achieve her own unity.

To undo the work of the Congress of Vienna, which only rearranged the divisions made in the three partitions, would mean to break up Prussia, and it would logically lead, not to the separation of 2,000,000 Germans in East and West Prussia from the main Germanic mass, but to their ultimate absorption into a Slav state, since they would lie between the mass of the Poles and the Baltic.

Bismarck foresaw this and left behind many words of warning. Bülów and the present Kaiser have both labored to Germanize the mass of Poles, between three and four millions, along the eastern marches. But despite all sorts of land laws and other brutal and tyrannous methods, the effort of the Prussian state to dispose of the Polish problem has failed, and the Poles have steadily gained ground in Eastern Germany.

It is clear now that if Germany wins, she means to deal with the problem as a whole. She has conquered all of Russian Poland, and her armies occupy this



Shaded portion shows the regions in Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia inhabited by Poles.

region and much Russian territory beyond the Bug. By her aid Austria has won the victory she hoped for in the Balkans, and Serbia and Montenegro are at her mercy, and the hegemony of the Balkans will be assured to the Hapsburgs, unless the fortune of war materially changes.

Germany accordingly plans to ask Austria to cede the Polish districts of Galicia to the new Polish state; she means to take the Polish districts of Russia. So far the problem is simple. But what is she going to do with her own Poles? No one knows, and no answer to the question is at present possible. But it is safe to forecast that a victorious Germany will not consent to restore, even to a protected Poland, the Netze district or any considerable portion of Posen or Silesia.

Yet the creation of this Polish kingdom will bring its own perils. The real safety for Prussia has lain heretofore in the fact that both her neighbors, who shared in the work of destroying Poland, have had the same reasons as she has had for laboring to prevent the Poles from realizing their aspirations. Russian, Prussian and Austrian armies have more than once operated to subdue Polish insurrections, and the three robber states have been united by a common self-interest in thwarting Polish patriotism.

But once Russia and Austria have lost their Polish provinces neither will be concerned to help Germany retain hers. Russia most certainly will henceforth be prepared to take advantage of any Polish disaffection to intervene, either to replace Germany as the protector of Poland or else to complete the work of Polish liberation by freeing the Prussian Poles and rounding out the Polish kingdom by adding to it the 2,000,000 of Germans in the

East, who are an island in the sea of Polish Slavs and a barrier between Poland and her natural expansion to the sea.

Even if Russia is for a long time unable to take up the fight there will be a Polish problem. A state of 17,000,000 people, occupying a well defined and homogeneous country, will inevitably tend to seek absolute freedom. They will also look over the German frontiers to the millions of Poles still separated from the mass of their fellow countrymen and find in their wrongs new ground for hatred of the Prussians. Further, the tendency of the Slavs to push west and drive the Germans before them, a thoroughly peaceful form of invasion, will be redoubled when Poland has all become a German protectorate and only imaginary frontiers divide them from the Silesian and Posen districts.

It is clear, then, that the freeing of Poland will at once bring grave dangers to Germany; it may easily be the first step in the series which will thrust back the German in the East and raise a new Slav state in the valleys of the Oder, the Vistula and the Bug and along the Baltic from Pomerania to the Niemen.

A Buffer State.

But what is the alternative? The eastern frontier of Germany has always been an open frontier. The real menace to the German race in the future has always been recognized by German statesmen to lie in the East. Russia, whose population is expanding by millions every decade, and is already nearly three times that of Germany, will in the next half-century outstrip Germany by leaps and bounds, so far as numbers are concerned. Some time there must come that great Russian awakening signs of which have already been described by many since this war began.

Already Russia has proclaimed that her mission is to free the Slavs of Europe, the

Southern Slavs of the Adriatic, the Eastern Slavs of Bohemia and the Carpathian regions of Hungary. Pan-Slavism is on the march, and despite all the talk about British rivalry and French desire for revenge, every German knows that the real issue of the war lies between the Slav and the Teuton. The world is at war because Russia insisted upon her right to uphold the Serbian Slav against the Austrian German and the Hungarian Magyar.

If Germany can now detach the Poles from the Slavonic block, if Austria can add the Serb to her other Southern Slavs and bind them to the Hapsburg throne, as the Poles are to be bound to the Hohenzollern car and the Bulgarians are already united to the Central Powers, then Pan-Slavism will cease to be a potent force and a permanent menace to the Teutons. Between the Germans and the main mass of the Slavs will lie the Polish state, bound to the German Empire by bonds of economic and political character. On her open frontier Germany will have a buffer state, whose armies will be at her service.

Such is the German conception; it has its strong points; it has its obvious perils. German efforts in Alsace-Lorraine have not demonstrated that the German possesses any great genius for dealing with subject races; the Poles of Posen have never borne willing testimony on behalf of their Prussian masters. In raising up a semi-independent Poland Germany may raise up a ward whose own ambitions a few years hence will imperil German unity. But this risk the Germans seem prepared to take. They see the Russian menace in the near future and they are content to believe that they will be able to transform Poland into a useful and obedient servant.

If Russia Wins.

Let us now consider the other possibility. If Russia wins, then we are bound to believe that the Czar will, in some meas-

ure at least, seek to redeem the promises made to the Poles at the outset of the war. He will unquestionably take from the Austrians not merely Polish Galicia, but all Galicia, which he has once held in his hands and only lost after many months of occupation. It is reasonable to expect that the Polish districts west of the San will be added to the present Russian Poland. So far Russia will follow the German plans.

But what of the Poles in Posen, in East and West Prussia, in Silesia? There can be no mistaking the answer. If 3,000,000 Poles are now held under Prussian tyranny, and it is tyranny quite as severe as the Russian, then there are any reason why, given a Slav victory, the happiness of 2,000,000 Germans should not be subordinated to the unity of the whole Polish race?

If the Central Powers are completely beaten, if the Allies impose their will upon the German and Austrian nations, then it is a safe guess that East and West Prussia, Posen and considerable districts in Silesia will be added to the present Russian Kingdom of Poland, to which there will be also added the Austrian province of West Galicia. This would make a state of nearly 100,000 square miles and having a population of close to 25,000,000, more than four-fifths of whom would be Poles. Such a state would face the Baltic from the shores west of Danzig to the mouth of the Niemen, east of Königsberg, and both the cities would be included in its boundaries.

At most some 3,000,000 Germans would be included in this Slav state, if they were not swept out during the Russian advance, as the inhabitants of East Prussia were driven before the Russian invasions of 1914 and 1915. Actually the Germans would be forced back from the Vistula and the work of the Teutonic Knights in the districts of East Prussia would be

If Allies Win, the Old Polish Kingdom Will Be Reborn Under Russian Control.

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undone. The Slav frontier, whether Poland were Russian or free, would approach Berlin and halt less than 150 miles from the German capital.

A Free Poland.

Such a state might for some years remain a Russian protectorate, but it is pretty clear that at some time it would assert its own independence and it might then find support from Germany and from Austria-Hungary, because it would become a real buffer state and a true bulwark against the Russians. Conceivably it might seek an alliance with the Czechs of Bohemia, and two Slav states, independent of Russian influence, but freed from German tyranny, whether Hohenzollern or Hapsburg, might occupy Central Europe.

But a free Bohemia, like a free Poland, would mean the submerging of some millions of Germans in a Slav region, in which they are maintained by the political supremacy of their race in the country as a whole. The problem of the Slavs west of the Carpathians would also be raised. But it is unnecessary to extend the discussion of the other Slav questions here.

What it is essential to note is that the fate of the Poles is now hardly to be settled by this war without a very material change in their estate. It is wholly inconceivable that Poland, after the war, will be the same thing it was before; that the three fragments, separated by the three Partition Treaties and by the supervening agreement in the Congress of Vienna, will still be separated by artificial frontier and by three separate allegiances.

If Germany wins, if the Germans are able to have their way in the East, while consenting to a restoration of the ante-bellum conditions in the West, as they seem willing to do now, then Austrian and Russian Polish populations are likely to be united into a state under German control. To this may be added some small districts now Prussian which have a majority of their population Polish. But there can be no actual restoration of Poland under German direction, because this would entail an actual destruction of Prussian unity and undo the work of Frederick the Great.

But if the Allies win and Russia has her way in the East—a way that will not be opposed by any of her allies—then there will be a real Polish restoration under Russian protection, and there will be added to Russian Poland the Galician districts west of the San and the Prussian provinces of Posen, East and West Prussia and a portion of the Province of Silesia. Some 6,500,000 people, considerably more than half Slavs, will be taken from Prussia and added to the new Poland, which will remain a Russian protectorate for the first few years at least.

But either way the Poles stand to make some progress toward a national reintegration. A Russian victory would, from their point of view, conceivably give them the greatest profit. But it should be recognized that it is the Austrians who have treated the Poles with the greatest consideration. Under the Prussians and the Russians, the Polish sufferings have been about the same, but the Hapsburgs have no more loyal subjects than the Poles of Galicia. These Poles have no desire to exchange Austrian for German or Russian rule. This makes one more complication. But if they are added, either to a Prussian or a Russian Poland, they are bound to become the dominating force and to be the real architects of a new Polish edifice.

Terrible as have been the Polish sufferings so far in the war, it is now inconceivable that they should not profit by the conflict. The only thing that they have actually to fear is that the war may end in a complete draw and the status quo ante be restored in the East. This would postpone the day of settlement of the Polish question and leave Europe with one of its gravest problems still to be disposed of. A German victory would be preferable to this, but a Russian victory, with the reconstruction of a Polish state including all the districts populated by Poles and some of the German inhabited districts between the Baltic and the present region of Russian Poland, would perhaps be the solution most to be desired. Even this would be but a step toward the complete freeing of Poland, but it would be a long step.